

*Sermon for Christ Church, January 10, 2010; 1 Epiphany, Year C  
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22; Is this it?; by Rev. John Perry*

John baptizes with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus gets baptized, and the Holy Spirit is there, upon him and in him. If we were to read a little further in Luke, we would learn what the Holy Spirit, then enables in Jesus. To quote: “Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee . . . he began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.” [Luke 4:14-15]

The baptism of Jesus, and with it, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him, mark the beginning of his ministry. Indeed, they make his ministry happen. Baptism, then, is baptism into ministry. This was true for Jesus; and this is true for us, also. This is the idea I wish to explore with you today – *our* baptisms, are linked with *his*; and they both have to do with ministry.

I’ll start with something more ordinary; about the time of year we are now in, and with the season that has just passed. The holidays are over. Christmas and New Year’s have come and gone. Which often means this is a time for feeling let-down; time for the post-holiday blues. I think we would not be human, if we did not ever feel this way. We want the excitement to continue; but we look around and see things pretty much as they were before, and we think, ‘Is this it?’

Getting back to Jesus’ baptism, I wonder if the same question, might have been asked by the other people who were there; the people in the crowd. They had been baptized by John, and then they saw Jesus get baptized. As they remain around, watching, waiting . . . are they wondering: Is this it?

If you had been in that crowd, you would have just been baptized, yourself. You had not previously encountered Jesus; he has not yet begun his public ministry. So you watch this person Jesus get baptized also. And then the heavens open. We don’t know what that looked like, but it must have been pretty impressive. And then on top of that, there was a voice from heaven. But however dramatic these events were, it appears from the Gospels passages that follow, that nothing anywhere near so dramatic happens right after that. This fellow Jesus is still there; so you are left to wonder if something *else* is supposed to happen, what with the heavens opening and all that.

Besides which, don’t forget that you *yourself* have just gone through a rather intense experience. You just responded to the call of a charismatic preacher; you’ve gone into that river and got yourself baptized. And then this other fellow Jesus has done the same. So what’s going to happen now? What’s going to happen to *you* now? Is this it?

I make this comparison, wondering if a person at that time, had felt a let-down after having been baptized; comparing it with the kind of let-down we might feel after the holidays. And I use the question, ‘Is this it?’ as a link between them. Because I’m trying to find an entry point for us, into the Gospel story. In the hope that such an entry point may help us gain perspective, make meaning, in our lives, in the circumstances we face. Because I can’t help but think, that there have been times in our lives, when we have looked around, and wondered, ‘Is this it?’

So let's look at the Gospel story. And let's go back in Luke a little bit, to Chapter Three, just before the events of today's Gospel passage. John the Baptist appears on the scene. He proclaims a baptism of repentance. Crowds of people come out, to get baptized. But before they actually *do* get baptized, they have a conversation with him. Imagine yourself, in that crowd; you ask him the question, "What are we supposed to do?" John does *not* answer by saying, 'Just get baptized;' he instead tells them how to live. He tells them how to do ministry, in their own lives. 'Share coats, and food, with those who need them, among the people you meet.' 'If you're a tax collector, do it right, do it in an honest manner.' He's describing for them, what doing ministry will look like, in their lives.

Listening to what John says, you are impressed; so you and the others ask whether this guy might actually be the messiah. This is where we pick up today's Gospel story. John tells you, "No, there's someone else coming, more powerful; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

So after hearing all this; after learning that getting baptized is linked to doing ministry in *your* life – as your own life actually *is*. And after learning that there's a Holy Spirit who will somehow play a role in this. *Then*, you make your decision; you go ahead, and get baptized; you say, 'Yes, this is for me.'

Now let's skip ahead in Luke's Gospel; to Chapter Four. As I mentioned earlier, we learn that Jesus, with the power of the Holy Spirit making it possible, begins teaching, doing ministry, impacting many lives. This sounds great. But then, just a bit further in the story, we learn of his rejection at the synagogue in Nazareth. *That* must have been a let-down for him. One almost wonders if he asked himself, "After all that . . . is this it?"

My point, is that we are linked with Jesus. By our baptism. If you can imagine yourself, to be there with him by that river; what has happened is that you have made your choice to be baptized, and now so has he. You share a common perception about baptism – that it has to do with ministry in one's own life. You share an awareness, that the Holy Spirit will help to make this ministry happen. And, you also will share a common experience, of doing ministry; of life as a baptized person in the aftermath of that dramatic, wonderful event by the river. Your life, as a baptized person doing ministry, is going to be marked by some accomplishments. And, it will *also* be marked, by times that will be a lot less dramatic; and by times that may not go well at all. Times that will leave you wondering, "Is this it?"

Your biggest problem, will be lack of perspective. You may not get to see, you may not remember, how your ministry remains linked with that fellow you watched get baptized after you, in that same river. You won't realize, how much you share with him. You may be looking for something more, as you wonder, 'Is this it?' Because, lacking perspective, you won't see the ministry that is actually getting done. Through you. With the help of the Spirit. Or, lacking perspective, you'll forget that's what this life as a baptized person is supposed to be about. You'll be looking for something else. Instead of that linkage. Linkage, is powerful. It carries us along; it gives us meaning; it sustains us.

Remember: baptism, is baptism *into ministry*. This was true for Jesus, and it is true for us. The ministry you and I do, is different from his – each person's ministry is unique – but it is *linked*

with his. To get a better sense of what ministry is supposed to look like, let's see what the catechism says; please take out your prayerbooks. Page 855: "What is the ministry of the laity?"

"The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church."

"To bear witness to him wherever they may be; according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world." Wherever you are; whatever your circumstances in life; every last one of you, is able, to do this ministry. And, this *is*, what you do.

Ministry *is* happening. By you, and through you. In your own lives. I have perspective on this, because I get to watch it happen; I get to watch you do it. In so many ways. Even while, *you* may have let-downs; even while, *you* may wonder: Is this it?

Yes, this *is* it. Step back and see. You *are* living the life. God bless you. And it's grand, really. I get glimpses of how grand it is. Like when I visit someone in the hospital who is about to have surgery, and there's a vase of flowers there from you, and I learn you have just been there before me. Like when I want to take someone to her doctor's appointment and I can't, but you can, and you do, and you wait there with her, many hours. Like when there's a special meal here, and everyone wants to sit or stand around and talk, and I look, and there you are, having left your own friends, so you can serve others, bringing them slices of cake. Like when I help fix some radiator covers so a children's playgroup can get started, and then I look, and even though you are not at all well, there you are, banging away with me. Like all the times you have called someone, or spoken with them, to offer encouragement or support, or just to be there with them. Linked ministries. Linked ministries. Ours, with each other's; and ours, with that of Jesus Christ. Is this it? Yes; it *is*. There's no need to look for anything more; anything substantially different. Our lives, living them this way, are linked to this person Jesus, who also got baptized into ministry. And we *do* have perspective on his story, thanks to this Gospel, and thanks to this Eucharist we celebrate. We see how grand *it* was, right through all the let-downs he surely experienced. So let's have some perspective on our own stories. See how rich they are, with meaning.

Now that we realize how linked we are. Perhaps we can also hear what Jesus heard, at that river. And realize, thanks to the linkage of our shared baptisms, our shared ministries; that it is meant for us, as well: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Amen.